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Taiwan and a Killing in California

On Oct. 13, a Chinese-American journalist named Henry Liu sent a terse letter to me about the Taiwanese government's attempts to intimidate Chinese-language newspapers in this country. The China Times, he wrote, "was a victim of political interference which our laws prohibit." It was to be the last letter Liu was to write.

The next day, two assassins scouted Liu's suburban Daly City, Calif., neighborhood by bicycle. A day later, they returned, waylaid Liu in his garage, whipped out pistols and shot him three times.

The day after the tragedy, Liu's wife, Helen, wrote me an anguished letter. "I have terrible news to inform you," she began. After the shooting, the assailants fled, she reported, "before I caught sight of their faces." But she thought she knew who they were: hired assassins of the Taiwanese government.

Helen Liu was right. The Taiwanese authorities, after vehemently denying any part in the assassination, have now reversed themselves. They have admitted that Taiwan's military intelligence agency was involved in the shooting and have arrested the official believed to be responsible.

Though the Taiwanese deserve credit for accepting responsibility, intelligence sources believe that the Taiwanese decided to make a clean breast of the affair and claim that it was an unauthorized, isolated incident. If they can make an arguable case that Liu's assassination was a regrettable aberration, they might avoid retaliation by Congress.

For an amendment to the Export Control Act

authorizes Congress to cut off weapons shipments to countries that engage in systematic harassment of their critics in the United States. Taiwan receives \$800 million a year in military aid that could be threatened by the Liu murder.

There is evidence of a pattern of harassment, which I have documented in the past. Here's the record:

■ Five years ago, I reported that Taiwan had sent streams of agents into the United States to infiltrate Chinese-American groups that favored communist China. This was confirmed by a secret 1979 Senate report, which also reported that the Taiwanese government had even considered sending letter bombs to prominent Americans who were pro-Peking.

■ Three years ago, I reported that Chen Wen-cheng, a Carnegie-Mellon University professor who had dared to criticize the Taiwanese government, had died violently during a visit to his native Taiwan. There was evidence that he had been viciously tortured during 13 hours of interrogation by the security police. But the Taiwanese authorities claimed he had committed suicide by jumping off a high-rise building.

The Taiwanese admission of involvement in the Liu murder came as a surprise. Intelligence sources confirmed to my associate Donald Goldberg that the killers belonged to the Bamboo Gang, one of Taiwan's largest organized crime combines. The government had just begun a massive crackdown on organized crime in Taiwan; intelligence sources believe the Bamboo Gang killers murdered a troublesome government critic as part of a deal to win immunity for their organization.